

The stars come out to honor Brinkley

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 Date 15 NOV 1991

It must have been a slow news day.

Otherwise, how could so many of those who report the news and those who make it show up for ABC News President **Roone Arledge's** 10th-anniversary celebration of "This Week with **David Brinkley**" Wednesday night at Union Station?

On hand was a swarm of journalists: NBC's White House correspondent **Andrea Mitchell**; CBS chief Washington correspondent **Bill Schaffer**; and the stars of ABC, including anchor **Peter Jennings**, White House correspondent **Brit Hume**, "Nightline" host **Ted Koppel**, "20/20" 's **Barbara Walters** (on the arm of Virginia Sen. **John Warner**), "PrimeTime Live" 's **Sam Donaldson**, and correspondent **Cokie Roberts**.

Senators included Majority Leader **George Mitchell**, **Richard Lugar**, **Lloyd Bentsen**, **Patrick Leahy**, **John Kerry**, **Robert Dole**, **Paul Simon**, **Sam Nunn** and **Charles Robb**. Also on hand were Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman **Colin Powell**, HUD Secretary **Jack Kemp**, Federal Reserve Chairman **Alan Greenspan**, former CIA Director **William Webster**, British Ambassador Sir **Robin Renwick**, Saudi Arabian Ambassador Prince **Bandar Bin Sultan**, and grandes dames **Susan Mary Alsup**, **Polly Fritchey**, and **Evangelina Bruce**.

But even with the solid-gold guest list, nobody was talking politics. Except for Mr. Dole, who deflected a question about his undecided re-election plans with the quip: "I think Mario Cuomo should make up his mind."

"A slow news week? I don't think so," said Mr. Jennings, who came in directly from his newscast at the ABC bureau here.

Then he added — Brit, Cokie and Andrea, are you listening? — "In Washington you're so accustomed to being spoon-fed the news, if you don't get it on a given day, it's slower."

"I've heard nothing sensitive discussed," said Mr. Robb, who was talking to U.S. Information Agency Director **Henry Catto** about revamping the highway in front of his home, so "he can get out of his garage. . . . Really heavyweight stuff."

Otherwise, everybody at the reception stood around casually, eating miniature crab cakes, salmon and shrimp, waiting for the receiving line to diminish and telling "Brinkley" stories.

"He doesn't badger you," said Mr. Dole. "I can't say the same for [Sam] Donaldson."

"He has a great eye for excess," said Mr. Hume. "It amuses him and fascinates him. It's been part of his journalism to capture it. He couldn't get over Imelda Marcos' shoes! That was Brinkley all the way."

But Mr. Hume's favorite story happened in October 1976. It was the day after Barbara Walters and Harry Reasoner debuted as anchors on the ABC Nightly News "amid the biggest hype that anybody had ever seen."

Mr. Brinkley, then with NBC, started his broadcast with, "Good evening, and welcome back."

"That's David being true and funny," explained Miss Walters. "That's what happened, the audience did all come back! As they probably should have."

Somehow, Miss Walters and the rest of the network stars — despite million-dollar contracts and egos to match — became humble when talking about Mr. Brinkley.

"I don't very often talk to David, I listen to David," said Mr. Jennings. "When I came back to America eight years ago [as anchor], had David Brinkley decided to squash me, he could have done it quite easily. He decided in fact to support me."

"This Week' with 'X' wouldn't be the same," said the show's court jester, the outspoken Mr. Donaldson.

"He does it by asking very gentle, courteous questions," explained Mr. Koppel. "I think he ends up getting just as much out of people as those of us who push a little harder."

Mr. Koppel's favorite Brinkley story happened after his 1985 trip to Saigon on the 10th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. Mr. Koppel, who had been a correspondent during the war, agreed to do a question-and-answer on Mr. Brinkley's show.

Just off the airplane, Mr. Koppel put in his earpiece and heard Mr. Brinkley say "Good morning, Ted."

"And I said 'Good morning,' and I realized that was all David was going to ask," he remembers. "Good morning" was the question! I then had to fumble around and think of something to say."

"The best program," said Mr. Brinkley himself, "is when you have a good news story, a guest who knows something about it and who is willing to talk and able to talk. That's a rare and formidable series of requirements which we don't always meet."

Can he believe it's been 10 years?

"Yes, I can," Mr. Brinkley said, smiling.

— Anne Gowen